DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 752 TE 001 989

AUTHOR Klein, Marvin L.
TITLE An Approach to Curriculum Design in Language Arts.
INSTITUTION Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE Oct 69
NOTE 8p.
JOURNAL CIT Wisconsin English Journal; v12 n1 p35-42 Oct 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer), Composition (Literary), *Conceptual Schemes, *Curriculum Design, *English Curriculum, Grade 7, Grade 12, *Language, *Language Arts, Literature, Rhetoric, Secondary Education, Symbolic Language

ABSTRACT

If language arts programs are not to be a hodge-podge, a concerted effort must be made to find common concepts about language which might be the framework for the discipline called "English." Such factors as the contributions of various disciplines to the language arts, the influence of modern learning theory on curriculum design, and the relationship between the development of electronic communication and the continued existence of the written word have to be considered and incorporated in any effective curriculum design. As part of the conceptual approach, consider the fact that language is an arbitrary system, a learned system, a system subject to cultural change, a describable system, a tool for communication, and an art form. (Included are diagrams of two conceptual hierarchies, and two sample units--one for grade 7 or 8 on syntax, and one for college bound seniors on Joseph Conrad's "The Lagoon"--which demonstrate ways in which conceptual structuring can be utilized.) (DD)

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U.S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

WISCONSIN ENGLISH JOURNAL;
Vol. 12, No. 1, October 1969

AN APPROACH TO CURRICULUM DESIGN IN LANGUAGE ARTS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

MARVIN L. KLEIN
Cooperative Curriculum Development Center
Manitowoc

ED042752

Perhaps at no time in the history of education have so few been asked to accomplish so much — teach young people to handle language with a reasonable degree of facility. The task remains basically the same. However, over the years our soul-searching has produced more questions than answers. What is language arts? What is the role of the language arts teacher? What should be included in the curriculum? Where should various elements, i.e. grammar, semantics, etc. be placed in the curriculum?

Educational research and scholarly developments in various disciplines have, in many respects, helped to answer some of these questions while at the same time they have created new ones; perhaps the most pressing being — what shall be the function of related disciplines? Is there an innate interdisciplinary relationship? If so, how does one find a binding core? If not, are there major contributions that various disciplines can make to the development of a language arts curriculum?

For instance, have we taken into account contributions of modern learning theory? Consider particularly the thinking of Jean Piaget. If Piaget's thinking relative to a child's ability to abstract is sound, when can we expect a child to be able to make symbolic extensions beyond self, incorporating language? How close is the relationship between language and thought? Piaget seems to hint that the tie has been over-emphasized. It appears that many of the basic premises upon which present language arts programs have been built will not withstand Piagetian examination.

What about the role of philosophy? The obvious implications of semantics need not be reiterated, but it appears that the heart of semantics, that is meaning theory, is often not incorporated into many of our curriculums. Should not a consistent and satisfying theory of meaning underlie the development of semantics in a curriculum, whether the theory be pragmatic, empiric, or a combination of syntax, empiricism, and pragmatics?

TE 001 989

In addition, are we overlooking the possibilities of modern logic for our programs? In the past, most language handbooks included brief and often faulty units on Artistotelian logic. The intended applications to the problems of the language arts teacher were not always clear. Very little has been done with symbolic logic, yet it appears that mastery of its rudiments can aid students in sentence structure and total organization of thought. Simply learning the distinctions between sufficient and necessary conditionals appears worthy of consideration.

What portent is there in the thinking of people such as Susanne Langer and Marshall McLuhan? Will the extensions of man preclude need for writing and reading as we know it now? What of the symbolic extensions of thought in terms of a teachable system? Is the language arts teacher actually in a futile battle doomed from the outset?

Finally, consider anthropology as a contributor to our academic milieu. As the habitat of linguistics, anthropology's contributions are obvious. But what of the

Copyright Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, 1969.

role of man in the development of culture? Can man's reach for meaning in life be programmed, even arbitrarily?

To answer these many questions and others like them is to at least partly answer the question of role for the language arts teacher and the language arts curriculum. In the past few years, various curriculum development centers have been working with many of the newer ideas in language study in attempts to reach some conclusions about specific purpose and role for the program and teacher. At Oregon, emphasis has been on grammatical analysis; at Nebraska, composition, with Francis Christensen's "generative rhetoric" of the sentence and paragraph; at Northwestern, elementary materials. In all of these centers and others like them, new additional ideas and areas are being considered. However, in many of the curriculum projects scattered throughout the country, groundwork and conceptual foundation appear vague or even nonextant.

If language arts programs are not to be a hodge-podge, there must be a concerted effort to find a common understanding of the major elements that are language arts. In other words, questions like those posed earlier in this article must be considered and incorporated if essential.

It appears that one workable approach is that advocated by the Cooperative Curriculum Development Center located in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. This center, operating through CESA #10 and under a federal Title III grant, serves the three counties of Calumet, Manitowoc, and Sheboygan in eastern Wisconsin.

Staffed with six permanent members, the Center aids in curriculum development, consultant, evaluative, and implementation services for the schools in the area. The rationale of the Center is of an essentially two part nature. 1) Subject disciplines can be developed under a hierarchy of subsuming concepts. 2) A taxonomy of questions such as that of Dr. Norris Sanders' *Classroom Questions: What Kinds?* based on Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain* should structure the classroom situation so that critical thinking is involved in the conceptual development.

As part of the conceptual approach, consider the following:

MAJOR CONCEPTS ABOUT LANGUAGE WHICH MIGHT BE THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISCIPLINE CALLED 'ENGLISH':

LANGUAGE IS:

A. An arbitrary symbol system

Language is an arbitrary system conveyed by temporal (oral) and spatial (written) symbols, designed by humans to enable them to categorize, structure, and control reality.

1. Semantics: The study of how symbols mean
   a. referent—oral symbol—written symbol
   b. categorization through abstraction
   c. percepts—concepts
   d. specific to general continuum
   e. denotation and connotation
2. Logic and critical thinking
   a. induction—deduction
   b. fact—inference—judgment
   c. truth—validity—soundness
   d. stereotype
   e. fallacy

B. A learned system
Language is learned, not instinctive, and demands the development of specific skills.
1. Speaking
2. Listening
3. Reading
4. Writing

C. A system subject to cultural change
Language is the basis of culture, but it is also a product of culture.
1. Usage—result of societal attitudes toward various forms of a language.
   a. levels of usage
   b. attitudes toward various levels
2. Dialects
   a. geographic
   b. functional
   c. literary
3. History of language
   a. structure
   b. vocabulary—etymology
4. Lexicography

D. A describable system
Language is a system which can be described accurately and scientifically.
1. Grammar
   a. phonological structure
      (1) sounds
      (2) pitch
      (3) juncture
      (4) stress
   b. morphological structure; combination of phonemes into meaningful units.
      (1) bases and affixes
      (2) words
   c. syntactic structure; combination of morphemes into strings of meaningful units.
      (1) words
      (2) phrases
      (3) clauses
      (4) sentences
2. Meta-grammar
   A system devised to describe the grammar of a language; meta-grammars of English:
   a. traditional
      (1) scholarly
      (2) school
   b. structural—immediate constituent—string analysis
   c. generative—transformational—sentence producing
   d. tagmemic
   e. stratificational
3. Graphemics
   a. letter
   b. word

c. spelling
d. punctuation
e. handwriting

E. A tool for communication

Language is a tool to tell, to inform, to explain, to persuade, to enjoin, to express, and to socialize.

1. Composition—Rhetoric—oral and written
   Expository, Persuasive, Narrative, Imaginative
   a. subject matter—responsibility
   b. audience—responsibility
   c. purpose—responsibility
   d. point of view—voice
   e. tone
   f. organization
2. Stylistics
   a. Rhetoric of the word and phrase
      (1) diction
      (2) figurative language
   b. Rhetoric of the sentence—syntactic choices
      (1) basic patterns
      (2) compounding
      (3) embedding
      (4) adding
      (5) permutating
   c. Rhetoric of the paragraph (see Christensen's material)
3. Mechanics
   a. oral
      (1) pronunciation
      (2) enunciation
      (3) gesture
      (4) stance (physical)
   b. written
      (1) punctuation
      (2) spelling

F. An art form

Language is a media with which artists preserve and evaluate human experience as they perceive it.

1. Literature
   a. genre
      (1) essay
      (2) short story
      (3) novel
      (4) poetry
      (5) drama
   b. tone and point of view
      (1) comedy
      (2) tragedy
      (3) parody
      (4) satire
   c. thematic
      (1) hero
      (2) anti-hero

(3) mock heroic
(4) moral and ethical

This outline formulates six powerful concepts:

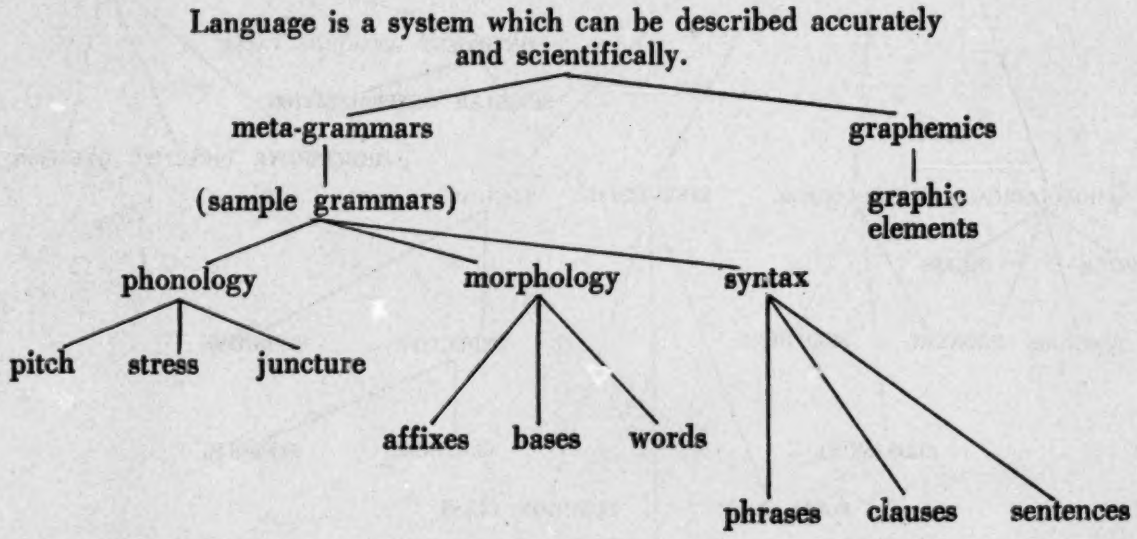
1) Language is an arbitrary symbol system.
2) Language is a learned system.
3) Language is a system subject to cultural change.
4) Language is a describable system.
5) Language is a tool for communication.
6) Language is an art form.

These concepts relate to important problems and give structure to a particular segment of knowledge—language.

This is the core of the entire language arts program K-12; however, these are not concepts to be developed a year at a time for six years. If they are truly powerful, they should be all encompassing; the heart of the program each year. It's obvious that at certain points in a child's language education certain concepts will receive greater emphasis than others. For instance, the fourth concept, in many instances might receive emphasis at the junior-high level where the study of formal grammar is often introduced. This, however, doesn't preclude its functioning throughout the entire curriculum in a less formal manner.

One of the major problems to be faced is that of redefining powerful concepts at a teachable level of abstraction. In outline form, they are obviously too general to be workable in the classroom. Since redefinition is essentially a movement toward less abstract elements in terms of student experiences, vocabulary, and subject matter, it is at this point that there is a crucial need for depth in the discipline and knowledge about and experience with teaching methodology, e.g., exposition—inquiry continuum.

One way in which concept structure and redefinition can be approached is to break the powerful concepts into middle power and low power concepts, thus working toward a lesser degree of abstraction until you reach the specific low level concepts which constitute the bulk of day-to-day classroom work. Visualize a conceptual hierarchy in the form of a pyramid with lower level concepts at the base, i.e., concept D — a describable system.



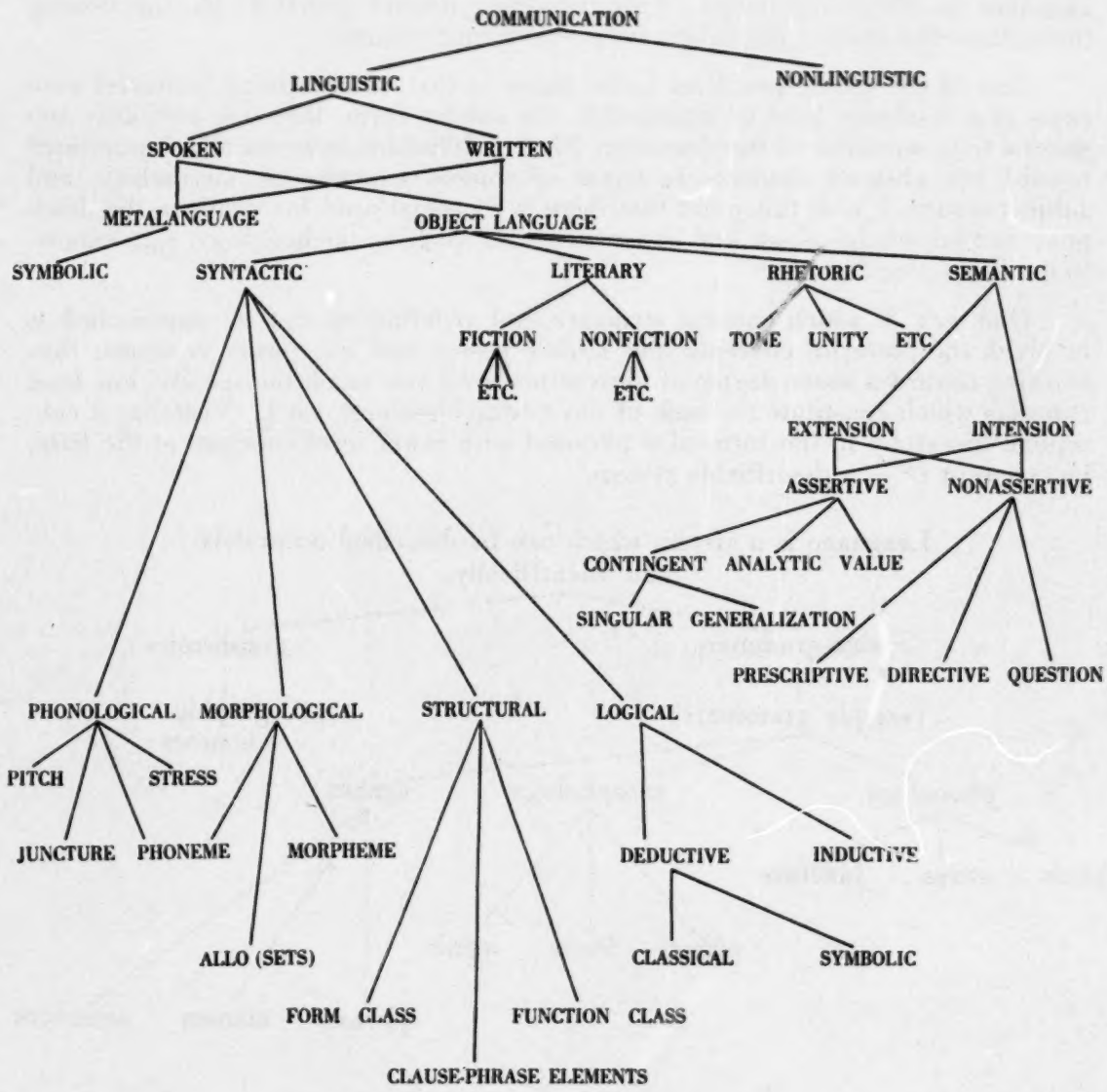
This procedure does not provide a redefinition as such but does move you in a logical manner to a stage of abstraction that allows for easier redefinition, remembering that you are concerned with redefinition for student assimilation.

In addition, the "branching hierarchy" allows for an overall look at the entire program, a thing most of us seldom do, since we are concerned with our own little niche most of the time.

Also, and perhaps most importantly, such a technique provides a basis for structuring concepts within a discipline. A ranking is suggested with all important concepts branching from a major classification of the conceptual hierarchy. Any element then not directly traceable to a higher concept on the scale should be questioned as far as its legitimate place in the curriculum is concerned.

It is conceivable that a starting point for curriculum development within a given school system could be an arbitrary conceptual hierarchy such as the following:

CONCEPTUAL HIERARCHY



It is, of course, important to remember that such a structure as this is only a beginning step. These items are not necessarily discrete; however, some type of dichotomizing appears to be necessary in any discipline if structure and sequence is to be maintained. Obviously, also, this structure requires vast redefinition. Nevertheless, with this hierarchy in mind, assignment of subconcepts (middle power) can be made to individual grades on the basis of professional judgment, remembering that assignments, at least the present time and in some areas, are to a large extent, arbitrary.

Assume, for instance, that our powerful concept, "Language is a describable system" will be emphasized in 7th and 8th grades. Further suppose elements of syntax will be emphasized in the 8th grade. Consider the following sample:

SAMPLE

I. Language is an arbitrary symbol system that can be described scientifically.

A. A grammar is an explanation of the system of language. It attempts to answer questions relating to language structure.

B. There are several grammars; not *the* grammar but *a* grammar is possible.

1. Structural concepts of syntax:
   a. Sentences are grasped intuitively.
   b. Sentences have two main parts — subject and predicate.
   c. S → NP + VP is an opening symbolic representation.
   d. Basic sentence types are called kernels.

Material: Seven words: the, ate, hungry, missionary, alligator, greedily, a

Directions:

1. Arrange these words into as many different possible patterns as time allows.
2. Observe which patterns or groups classify or qualify as sentences.

Conclusions:

What can be observed about sentences? Nonsentences? How can a description of a sentence be devised?

COMMENTS ON THE SAMPLE UNIT:

1. Note that there is the basic inductive method inherent in the methodology. If time and space allow, this could be more aptly illustrated with further experiments.
2. Note that the same material could be used to develop other subconcepts as well (e.g., symbolism, form-structure word classifications, etc.).

The lesson, at least theoretically, is structured and relates to others in the curriculum. The child is led through induction to discoveries about language structure, discoveries designed to reinforce the powerful concept of system in language. Through the middle and lower power concepts, redefinition takes place to the extent of reducing semantic and psychological complexities by providing for adequate elaboration.

Another example might be the following literature schema developing the concept of conflict through pride and honor for a class of college bound high school seniors:

I. Literature through conflict:

A. Man with man:

Pride and honor are major factors in man's conflict with man. These ideas are developed in the following story: "The Lagoon" by Joseph Conrad.

1. Pride-honor-cowardice are closely allied characteristics of man.
2. There is an essential paradox in man as evidenced in the fine distinctions between love and hate, courage and cowardice; this paradox is at least partly attributable to pride and sense of honor in man.
   a) Arsat exhibits this essential paradox in his behavior.

3. Dichotomies of right-wrong, moral-immoral are tied to man's pride and honor system.
   a) Arsat reveals the complexities of the dichotomous philosophy.
   b) There is an innate human understanding of the existence of the complexities between Arsat and his brother.
   c) Personal conscience tends to refuse any justification or attempt at justification outside a dichotomous range.
4. Man's struggle with a search for self is inseparable from his struggle for existence with fellow man.
   a) Arsat pulled by love for both Diamelen and his brother.
   b) Arsat's relation with Tuan ties cultures within deeper human elements of pride and honor.

Again, note the role of conceptual structuring.

What is proposed then is obviously no panacea. It doesn't contain a magical formula for deciding course content or for assigning powerful ideas. It does force conscious structuring of the discipline. If teachers within a system set out to develop a conceptual hierarchy, they will be forced to consider questions relating to content, inter-disciplinary relationships—what powerful concepts from anthropology have a bearing in the language arts program? They will be forced to openly consider questionable elements for the curriculum—what powerful concepts does the teaching of social etiquette support? They will be forced, in short, to define the role of the teacher and answer the question, "What is the language arts curriculum?"